OVERCOMING LITERACY BARRIERS THROUGH INTERVENTIONS: A MIXED METHODS STUDY by Cynthia W. Owens, May 2014
Advisor, Dr. Linda Dorn, Professor of Reading

ABSTRACT

A convergent parallel mixed methods study was used to examine the effect of multiple layers of writing instruction for accelerating the literacy achievement of at-risk kindergarten students. Participants included 33 teachers and 151 kindergarten students from 9 schools. The effects of Treatment 2 Group (whole class, small-group writing instruction in the classroom, and Interactive Writing Intervention) and Treatment 1 Group (whole class and small-group writing instruction in the classroom) were compared to a Control Group (whole-class instruction). Additionally, a case study design with constant comparative analysis was used to examine the practices and instructional decisions of two expert intervention teachers (Yin, 2009). The quantitative and qualitative data were merged to reveal three key findings: (1) Students who participated in the Interactive Writing intervention (Treatment 2) obtained statistically significant gains over both the Treatment 1 Group and the Control Group on three literacy tasks (Writing Vocabulary, Hearing Sounds in Words, and Text Level; $F(2, 148) = 36.89, p < .01, \eta^2 = .33$, $F(2, 148) = 20.97, p < .01, \eta^2 = .30$, $F(2, 148) = 38.18, p < .01, \eta^2 = .34$ respectively); (2) Literacy behaviors of kindergarten students who were in the advanced proficiency range for text reading level made the most gains in writing skills; and (3) Analysis of diverse data sets uncovered five constructs - scaffolding, self-regulation, dynamic assessment, transfer, and reciprocity - to explain the phenomenon of teacher expertise in accelerating the literacy gains of kindergarten grade students during the Interactive Writing intervention.
The study confirmed that overcoming literacy barriers for at-risk kindergarten students is possible with the implementation of Interactive Writing intervention.